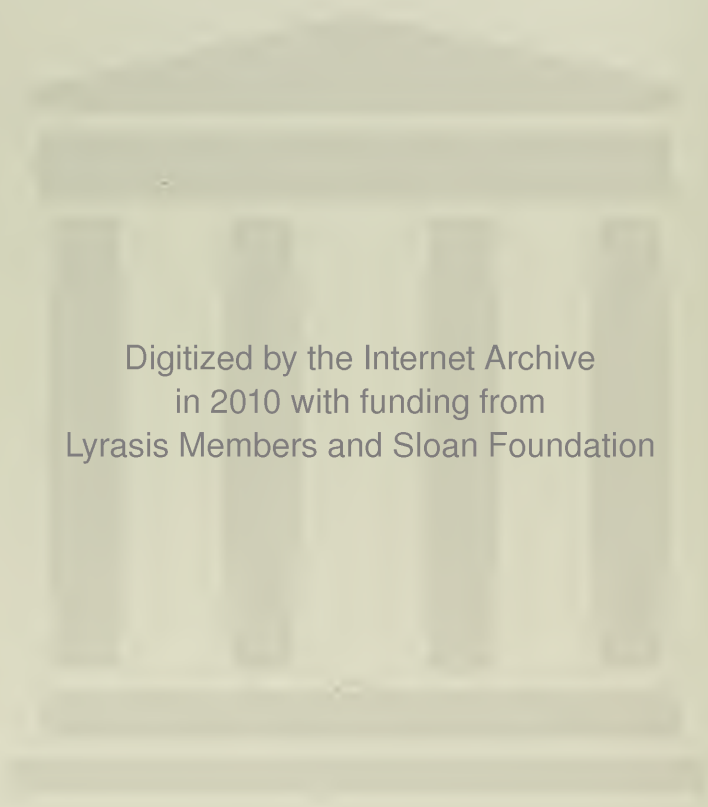



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Poem For the Season

That Same Whirling Motion Of The Thrower

SCOTT A. MINAR

In Ohio,
maple trees send their seeds
down on the half-wing of
a pale bird,

that same whirling motion of
the thrower, moving with a flutter
so dry, it crackles beautifully
like a dream remembered

for the first time in years.
A boy is twirling near
two spring maples. His arms
fling out, he is listening to

the whistle of an ancient sling
flinging stone or seed,
it doesn't matter. Inside,
someone yells: "What's all

this clutter?" Even as he moves,
honestly, he doesn't know.
Inside of us there is a
coiled spring that compresses and

is released, and again compresses and

is released, and again that same
motion, until years later
he will walk down the street
swinging a sweater in circles

above his head, whirling with
the turn and with the seeds
in Ohio, again and, oh . . .
again . . .

Me And Harris

DONALD PURCELL

WE'D SAT IN HARRIS'S PICKUP TRUCK for about an hour. We hadn't spoke because it was the solid hour of westerns, not that Harris ever says much anyway. The field and trees all around were misty, and it wasn't so dark as you'd think for three in the morning.

"I'd hire you for my housekeeper," Harris said all of a sudden, and he sort of gulped, saying it like it was hard for him to say it and he'd had to build up to it.

I pressed against him harder than ever.

We listened to Bayer Aspirin and then the WCYR Sockers and then Harris straightened with a jump, like he does, and tried about fifteen stations until he found more western. He settled and went on, smoother now, "Only I don't got a real spread. But I like having a place and the way I like it is kept up. She never kept up—butter wrappers on the floor and my records out of order so's I couldn't pick the one I wanted without hunting around. One time she dropped a tuna can in my tropical fish 'n I get home from driving all day and nothing to eat. We didn't talk neither."

Harris can't have a house or trailer because if he makes only one cent, she sends the sheriff around. All he can do is stay in the room over the Sunoco station and let the welfare pay because, Goddam her, it isn't as if he don't respect women.

That is true. Harris never touched me. I always pressed against him when we sat listening to CYR, and there was only me and Harris and the little radio light and I put my forehead up against his bare neck and felt good all over and jumpy inside like I feel when I see Charlene wheeling Eloise through Upper Cyrene. But Harris respects me because like he said, he was a married man of thirty and he couldn't do nothing or the law took it from him.

I said this time, "Harris, I bet that room of yours is some mess."

He said I'd better believe it. Then he went silent. When he spoke again his voice wasn't like he was asking me something so much as letting loose some secret that hurt to hold in and to let out too. He says, his voice quivery like I'd never heard it before, Did I want to see his place?

I shifted my cheek against his neck and squeezed harder. It felt wonderful.

He straightened so sudden and hard that I bounced off him. He started the truck, slammed us out of that field, and speeded the five miles into the Sunoco station.

He whispered to be quiet because it wouldn't look good, and he led me up the stairs. He pulled down the shades before he turned on the light.

I took one look and rubbed my hands together and started.

Harris sat on his cot, his back propped against the wall, and watched me.

I brushed the walls dry and wiped off his pictures, mostly cut-outs of roundups and mountains with snow except for a girl about three feet high with nothing on but a cowboy hat, cowboy boots, and a holster in between. I said I hoped she wasn't ticklish. Harris didn't say anything, just sat dreamy.

I went over to his closet with a mop.

"Hey!" He straightened fast, like he does. "Stop!"

"Don't you want all the floor cleaned?"

"Don't want no one looking in there!"

So I put the mop down and sat on his lap. He said he wished he had a beer from the fridge. I took one look into the fridge and started all over again. I filled his garbage can with food that had gone moldy, lined up what was left on the floor, and mixed a pan of soda and water. Harris asked for another beer. After I'd finished the fridge, I told him to get into his Barca-Lounger while I made the bed.

He said it was time to go home, and I said, "O K, but you turn that fridge off before I come next week so it'll be defrosted."

MY MOTHER SAID, "Where was you?" when I walked in. It was right after the school bus had passed, the one I took last year.

I said, "You'd never understand, but Harris respects me. He does." I went right on through and upstairs to bed. I felt like I floated up them stairs. I felt all melted inside, awful good, and I was thinking how I'd have to buy some of that spray-on stuff for after you defrost.

Harris comes to the bar about ten. He sits looking straight ahead, not at the TV. Harris never says much. Then when I get off about two, he drives me home in the pickup. He puts my bike in the back. For my fifteenth birthday he gave me a record about waking up with cactus all around. We always stop in a field and listen to CYR and I press against him and I feel like inside was nothing but liquid.

Saturday night, Harris drove right past our field saying, "Maybe I don't say much but I don't forget neither." When we got upstairs and lit the light, he opens the refrigerator and says, "See!" He'd remembered to turn it off!

He laughed because I let him see how glad I was that he'd remembered. I felt gladder then because Harris don't laugh often. See, that's the one thing with Harris: he doesn't tell you things, but I understand if he wants to be by himself inside so he doesn't have to talk if he doesn't want to. Not with me.

He sat on the Barca-Lounger right off. I sat on him. After a few forty-fives, I said, "Ain't you going to have a beer?"

"Warm," he said.

I did the refrigerator.

It was light again when I got home. No one else was up, but on the table was this little plastic bottle, and I tried remembering where I'd seen it, and then I remembered it was them pills the welfare lady give me. That was last year, and I'd forgot about them. So mother was putting them out for me. I picked that bottle up and threw it hard at the floor, and the pills rolled all over.

Upstairs in bed I felt bad I'd done that because in a way I like her for not saying a thing but just putting the pills there. I know she don't care much for Harris.

My old man hates Harris. But since he's on day shift we can't talk except on Sundays. When I come down that Sunday, my old man and I had a fight. He said I should go with them to the Upper Cyrene Volunteer Fire Department Field Day that afternoon.

I said they was treating me like I was still fourteen and I was paying room and board, wasn't I?

He said he wished he'd never lied about my age and got me that job and they'd make out some way without the room and board.

Before he went on and said about my going back to high school. I broke in and said, O K, I would go to the field day with them and come back at night with them too, because I knew he mainly didn't like Harris driving me home when he'd be there with our pickup.

FIRST THING when we got to the field day I look for Charlene. I found them by the horse pulling. Charlene said I could, so I took Eloise in the stroller and showed her the field day.

Wheeling Eloise around makes me feel good all over. I like looking down at her and figuring like I'm her so's I can know when she wants her bottle or dry cloths or having her blanket tucked. I propped her up and explained things to her even though she don't know what I'm saying.

At the garden stuff I was telling her how they braid onions when Mrs. Dawson come over to me.

The Dawsons are the first people I ever worked for.

"Dawn," Mrs. Dawson says, "how would you like living with us this fall?" She bent down a second to Eloise. They have four little kids. "We'd pay some and you could finish high school." Mrs. Dawson looked close into my face like she really cared how I'd answer.

I felt good about her wanting me, but at the same time when Mrs. Dawson and some of the others from the State U bring up about me finishing school and what are my plans I feel hot inside and I don't talk good. So I sort of stammered to Mrs. Dawson thanks and I'd let her know soon.

Back at the horse pulling I was holding Eloise up to see the horses when I felt someone big stepping close beside me. I didn't have to look up to know who it was. I kept on laughing with Eloise and not looking up.

I felt this big elbow poke into my side, so I had to look around. He stood grinning down to me; he wasn't like when he's in the bar; he was like he was feeling good there in the sunlight and having a few beers and like he hoped I'd feel good with him.

He planked his hand around my back and down hard on the upper part of my hip and held it there hot and pressing.

I tingled all over. I felt like something great was going to happen. Harris had never touched me before first. It had always been me.

And his hand there wasn't so much like he didn't respect me; it was more he wanted me knowing he liked me.

But Harris couldn't say out loud that he liked me. With Harris if in any tiny way he lets other people see what's inside him, he gets sore at himself and shuts up for another month.

I pulled away a little and showed him to Eloise. I was thinking, if I was living at Mrs. Dawson's, how could Harris drive me home at night?

Harris stood beside me at the barbecue, but he didn't touch me again.

It got dark and Ally and Del lit the spotlights and turned up their speakers so loud it hurt your ears at first. They sung their own song about Moosejaw and Red River like that is where they and all of us live except, naturally, we don't; and Ally and Del come from just over the line in P.Q. We danced some, but mostly Harris stood and listened and stared up at the stage, only his eyes seemed looking a thousand miles away.

Before the last number was finished, Harris pulls me out around back, where Ally and El's boy was beginning to load their

trailer with stuff from the show—the saddles on the saw horse and the totem pole and that sign saying “Western Saloon” hung up behind the drums.

Harris wouldn't move another step. He had to watch that stuff being packed into the trailer.

Dad come around the corner of the tent. He caught sight of Harris and run straight to him. “You married son-of-a-bitch!,” he hollered. He yanked Harris around hard by the shoulder.

I was all paralyzed and sick-feeling. Harris's face got very white. I was scared Harris was going to deck Dad.

I was wrong. Harris panted loud and swallowed. Then he seemed to shrivel down to Dad's size. He looked like he was caught trespassing by the law and ordered to get out.

Dad grabbed me hard away from Harris, and I almost fell over. When I got my balance, Dad had snapped up close and face to face with Harris.

Every one was standing in a circle around them and everything was quiet and time had stopped. Finally Harris did a funny thing, something I will always see in my mind.

He bends over. He puts both hands flat against his face and shakes like he was crying. After a while he straightens up big again. He makes a pushing like, only gentle, with both hands toward Dad like it was disgusting for him to have some one like Dad bust into his watching something great like Ally and Del's boy packing their western stuff. Harris slowly spins back to the trailer and Ally and Del was there with more stuff to pack and Harris watches them work like no one but him and them is in the world.

When he turned his back on Dad, that sort of loosened everything. Everyone moved on. It was the sort of thing people wouldn't forget, but they wouldn't talk about neither. Ally and Del finished packing and got into their wagon.

Dad grabbed my arm and led me off.

I looked back, and Harris just stood staring at the wall of the tent. I pulled hard and free of Dad and started to run back to Harris. But I saw how his shoulders trembled, and I knew he'd be mad if I came to him right then. I went on home with the family.

THE NEXT NIGHT AT THE BAR we both acted like things was the same as always, but I could feel Harris being all pressed in and heating up inside.

Harris was so ready to burst that I got a scary feeling, but at the same time I wanted to be with him too.

He didn't turn on the radio when we parked in the field. He coughed and then in a funny little voice he says he was wondering

if his honey'd noticed anything different about him tonight.

"Why, no, Harris."

"Take a good look." He switches on the dome light; he slides me over against my door and sits back against his door.

It took me a minute to notice something shiny by his hip. "That?" I ask him.

"My honey ain't so dumb," Harris says, and he draws aside his jacket, pulls up his shirt, and shows this leather belt about a foot wide with little brass circles all over. Fixed to the belt was this big shiny revolver.

I went all chilly.

"Ain't real," Harris says. He holds the revolver out for me.

I didn't want to touch it even, though I could see now it was mostly plastic.

"I been savin' up for a whole outfit. Got spurs last winter and boots this spring; they's in my closet. Got this last month."

The way he both whispered and choked, I knew Harris was saying to me what he'd never said to anyone else.

I took the revolver like I didn't mind.

"You wouldn' ever tell no one—like your father and some of them other firemen?"

"I wouldn't ever tell, Harris."

"Like it, Honey?"

"Yeah, Harris."

"That's my honey!" He pulls me against him hard enough so the revolver, which hits the gear shift, twists my wrist.

I hollered, "Ow!"

And that set everything loose in him, everything he'd had inside like his outfit and wondering if he'd ever had anyone to show it to. And he'd been holding in not having a job these days. And there was his respecting me too, I figure. All that came together and shot through him and drove at me.

It was like he was trying to bite my hand and tear off his jacket and hug me and put the revolver back in its holster. All at the same time.

I hollered, "Jeez, stop!"

Harris whapped his big hand over my face.

I tore free. I remember screaming "Harris, you be good!" I dove for the door handle. I don't remember much, but the next thing I knew I was on one knee in the field.

He landed on me with all his weight. He must have tripped at the door. We fell flat in the stubble, him on top. I heard a click inside my head. Everything went soft black.

I came to. Harris was puffing and wrestling at my jeans. It was a mixture of being hurt real bad and being scared. Yet I didn't

fight because it seemed like it had to be. It was all a swirl. I felt like inside I was all raw blisters. Harris grew quiet. We lay there. Even being sore all over I also had a cool-warm watery feeling, something like I feel with Eloise. But I don't remember much.

WHEN I LIMPED DOWNSTAIRS the next afternoon, Mother brought me a cup of coffee. She said, "I hope you learned a lesson."

I knew my eyes was black and my lips puffed on one side and dark red. I didn't say nothin'.

She give me a plate of ice cream. "I hope you'll be luckier than Charlene."

"Mother," I said, "it's a good thing I'm acquainted with Harris. That motorcycle crowd was ganging up on me and Vera after closing time. Harris come along and chased them away."

She knew I was lying.

After I ate I climbed back upstairs and lay on my bed and switched on CYR. I thought of Harris and how bad he'd been but how he couldn't help himself and how right now he'd be wishing he'd never shown me the revolver and done what he done.

I was thinking how he'd be at his end of the bar again that night because he didn't have no other place to go and how he'd sit exactly like always except he'd leave an hour before closing because he wouldn't want me thinking I needed worry about his ever asking to take me home again. He'd go back over Sunoco and knock off another six-pack and look at his posters.

The way Harris would be whirled in my mind. After a while I said to myself that there was nothin' for me to do but go to work at the Dawsons'. And I lay there and Harris swirled again through my mind just like before.

There was this announcement on the radio. It was Craig's Men's Store: "... for men who care to keep up the great traditions of our West" Something like that.

I sat up straight.

I run down through the kitchen and outside feeling a good idea even if I couldn't have said yet what it was exactly.

I rode my bike right into Cyrene to Craig's. Like their ad said they had these hats like Ally's and Del's, like on midways. Seventy-five dollars. I had them put it in a square box and wrap the box in plain paper so's people wouldn't be guessing what was inside.

Soon as Harris come in the bar that night, I went out and through the back and put the box on his pickup seat. Then I went back to work.

Just like I'd thought, he left an hour early. I heard him drive off.

But he come back before closing time.

In the field he turned on the radio. After a while he came close to me real gentle. He was very respectful all the way. He let me out at home at school bus time again, not that either of us said much.

We never do.

Poem For the Season For My Grandfather

KENDRA KOPELKE

Half the dandelions
were missing from the yard
when I found you,

bent over your green hands
near a pail of weeds.
The long chords of your neck

were pulling hard
on heavy curtains of sun.
At seventy-five with a heart

that had stopped
seven times. I thought
I might lose you,

Ten years ago I understood
we must take things away
as practice for permanence.

But dandelions come back every spring.
My spade enters the earth
carefully, like a key

to the last room
you entered. And the sun,
warm hands on my back,
remembers everything.

Love and Ethical Absolutism in Shakespeare

WALTER POZNAR

EVEN IN OUR SKEPTICAL AGE, few critics challenge the traditional idea that Shakespeare's plays show a profound ethical consciousness at work. Alfred Harbage is not alone in his belief that "except in a few scenes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there are not thirty consecutive lines in Shakespeare that do not levy upon the vocabulary of ethics, or relate in some way to standards of conduct, to choices between right and wrong."¹

But when we try to find these principles in the plays, we are faced, almost everywhere, with complex questions that make any reductive theory seem somehow insufficient and misleading. When we look closely at what Shakespeare reveals of the nature of love, for instance, his view turns out to be far less determinative than we might assume. In fact, the plays show that an effort to reduce love to an ethical principle is superficial and even dangerous when we confront the raw matter of human experience.

In almost every play, critics have isolated at least one character who, it is claimed, serves as a kind of ethical norm, a Greek Chorus that offers a vantage point from which ethical questions can be interpreted and resolved. Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet*, we are told, is an example of this ethical norm.² He gives the play, Dickey asserts, a fundamental contrast: "Set side by side passion and reason in the person of Romeo and the Friar oppose each other to the end."³ Gervinus assumed that the good Friar "expresses the leading idea of the piece in all its fulness, namely, that excess in any enjoyment, however pure in itself, transforms its sweet into bitterness; that devotion to any single feeling, however noble, bespeaks its ascendancy; that this ascendancy moves the man and woman out of their natural spheres; that love can only be an accompaniment to life, and that it cannot completely fill out the life and business of the man especially"⁴

Friar Laurence has some sensible and applicable comments to make on these ethical questions. His philosophical comments are certainly not without value or relevance. To those too apt to divide

the world into Good and Evil, the Friar very properly replies that within nature and man there is both Good and Evil. He is right to reprimand Romeo for talking in circles: "Be plain, good son, and homely in thy drift. / Riddling confession finds but riddling shrift" (II.iii.55-6). He is right to chide Romeo not for loving Rosaline, but for mooning over her. Violent delights *do*, far too often, result in violent ends. It *is* a concession in Prince Escalus to banish rather than execute Romeo. it *is* womanish and unmanly of Romeo to attempt to stab himself: after all, Juliet is alive, Romeo has escaped Tybalt's sword, and the law has modified its punishment.

The Friar believes what he says and remains throughout loyal to Romeo and Juliet, at the risk of outraging both families. His kindness is unquestioned; his comments sane; his behavior without reproach. How, given what he is, could he conceivably understand Romeo's love for Juliet? When Romeo cries out, upon hearing of his banishment, "Hang up philosophy! / Unless philosophy can make a Juliet, / Displant a town, reverse a prince's doom, / It helps not, it prevails not" (III.iii. 57-60), he is right—nothing can replace Juliet—but the Friar is no less right in thinking him a madman.

But however admirable the Friar's advice, he has almost no influence on the action of the play, other than the obvious part he plays in marrying the two lovers and arranging for Romeo's flight and reunion with Juliet. No one in the play changes because of anything he says or does. He does not resolve the feud. If the two houses are united at the end, it is not because the families have paid heed to his warnings, but because Romeo and Juliet are dead. Nothing is said at the conclusion about the importance of his warnings. All he does is summarize the events leading to this tragic development. No less than Escalus, he is helpless in a world where human passions prove too strong to be contained by appeals to prudent behavior or ethical truths. Dowden writes that "Shakespeare did not believe that the highest wisdom of human life was acquirable by mild, monastic meditation, and by gathering of simples in the coolness of the dawn. Friar Laurence too, old man, had his lesson to learn."⁵

The Friar's perspective is limited too. He has almost no conception of the force of Romeo and Juliet's love. He does not help in the least to understand what the two young lovers feel for each other or why civil brawls are beyond the reach of reason and moderation or why a fiery young Tybalt should tremble with indignation at the sight of a Montague at the ball. Nor can a Friar explain what makes Mercutio so magnificent a character, what purpose there may be in his Queen Mab speech, or what place in our lives the earthy attitude of the Nurse toward sex and marriage has. The passionate nature of man, its power and beauty and

autonomy, the Friar is at a loss to cope with.

THUS FRIAR LAURENCE'S COMMENTS and actions are neither totally effective nor nonsense, Sunday-school sermons couched in "rhymed sententiae, cant formulae."⁶ And the extent to which he can be seen as a moral guide to the reader raises broader questions. By what signs could one possibly vindicate Romeo's passion for Juliet? How, in other words, can we be certain that what the two young people feel is love, not simply youthful passion or romantic infatuation? It might be expedient and wise to warn a young man not to allow what looks like love to overrun caution and common sense *if* that young man is not a Romeo, if, in truth, what he feels is no more than lust. He can himself no more understand what he feels than can others until that feeling is tested. This, obviously, touches on the question of the nature of romantic love, how we can identify it, how it differs from eroticism and chivalric love. With Romeo and Juliet the danger is in going beyond their love, in transforming it into an earthly manifestation of divine love, as dangerous an approach as the opposite view that romantic love is a sickness, a poisonous elixir that warps our judgment and ends in total subjectivism. The opposition of romantic love and the normal world we live in is as invidious in *Romeo and Juliet* as it would be in Shakespeare's romantic comedies. Shakespeare nowhere suggests that the Nurse's concept of love is somehow of a lower order than romantic love, that it is crude and vulgar, or that Mercutio's flippant remarks on woman reflect an attitude essentially base and repugnant. There is no evidence that the Nurse or Mercutio is capable of romantic love. What the Nurse believes about man and woman does not debase her or make her less human.

The assumption that the love of Romeo and Juliet is so pure and sublime and radiant that it sheds its humanizing influence on us all is still another example of how easily we ignore the play itself. It is not at all certain at the conclusion of the play that the two families are reunited *because* they now know what romantic love is. Both families have lost the children they loved. That personal loss sufficiently explains their grief. Capulet is an old man, ready to forgive, trying to restrain Tybalt at the ball, conscious of how quickly the years have passed. There is no indication that the power and beauty of romantic love have touched him in any way. No one in the last scene betrays the faintest awareness of the nature of that love. And in this sense there is no Greek Chorus in the play, for no one can appreciate that love except Romeo and Juliet.

An even broader question is raised in the play, particularly by critics who are quick to stigmatize passion as destructive. There is

in Romeo and Juliet a hunger deeper than any rational need. That hunger tramples on reason and moderation and the rights of others and the obligations they perforce owe to their parents. It rises from the deepest wellsprings of the self to renounce everything incompatible with it. It is blind and tyrannical. That so headstrong a passion can bring bitterness and devastation in its wake goes without saying, but that it is culpable *because* it does so is to oversimplify the ethical issues involved, to argue after the event, to judge by consequences not by the nature of the passion. Would those who censure Romeo and Juliet do so if their love had *not* entailed tragedy and loss?

ETHICAL ABSOLUTES applied to love between man and woman in Shakespeare's plays must take account of certain thorny questions. Was Othello wrong to love Desdemona as he did, to commit himself wholly to her, to feel that in apparently debasing herself she had also destroyed him? Would he have been capable of killing her had he not loved her as he did? Was Desdemona wrong to accept him as her lord and master? Is such love weak and incomplete, too blind to be worthy of our respect? Was Ophelia the kind of young woman we prefer? The daughter whose love for her father and whose sense of obligation to him compel her to heed the admonitions of common sense and prudence? Reason tells us that love should wait on knowledge and experience before it commits itself, yet that is precisely what some of Shakespeare's women and men do not do. H. B. Charlton has said that in *The Taming of the Shrew* there is "a hearty appetite for bread, beef, and beer Petruchio is different from the wooers of romance, because he remembers the grocer, the butcher, and the tailor. He drags love out of heaven, and brings it down to earth."⁷ However admirable this may be in Petruchio, it is obviously irrelevant to a woman like Miranda in *The Tempest* who knows nothing of butchers and tailors. Is her love for Ferdinand therefore excessively romantic and sentimental? Will she be "cured" in the "real" world? What do Romeo and Juliet need to know of butchers and tailors? Launce in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* loves in his own fashion. Though the woman be fat, coarse and ugly, he accepts her for her homely virtues and, needless to say, for her dowry as well. He needs no romantic trappings, no Petrarchan visions, no lovers' vows and ardent expostulations to feed his soul.

The autonomy of the self is, in Shakespeare's works, indisputable. What it takes as its own, what it cleaves to with hoops of steel, derives neither its origin nor its power from ethical principles or the distilled wisdom of the ages. In this sense the invocation

of ethical absolutes violently and ineffectually challenges the intractable individualism of the self. This autonomy and exclusiveness are clearest in the choices some of Shakespeare's characters make, choices not in the least dictated by prudence or expediency. Nor, in the comedies, is this obvious truth obviated by the fact that some of the comedies treat love "in its lighter, more agreeable aspects, its prettiness and its absurdity . . ."⁸ Shakespeare's romantic heroines are remarkable women—intelligent, charming, patient, forgiving—substantially undifferentiated in ethical terms. If the choice each makes appears to us beneath her, wasted on someone as drab as Proteus in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* or as dense as Orlando in *As You Like It*, no one should feel tempted to sigh over the choice as a lapse in good taste, for Julia and Rosalind are in no doubt about what their lovers are. Each makes her choice, and though Rosalind helps Orlando to grow up, her love for him is not predicated on the possibility that he has the capacity to grow up.

The allegorical view of Shakespeare's women that sees in them the working of some divine power tends to reduce them to a single identity. G. Wilson Knight labors to cast Helena in this heroic mould: "She has become almost a divine or poetic principle, overruling, watching, containing him; or rather it is not she, but the Love overarching, overruling, both, as we find it in the Sonnets."⁹ But the choice is Helena's and its object is clearly unworthy of her. To state that such love seeks to uplift another, to irradiate him with the purity and selflessness of love, hardly accounts for the person chosen. Our natural sorrow that so bright a manifestation of selfless love should spend itself on someone as vile and unscrupulous as Bertram leads us inevitably to turn to some higher principle, some transcendent justification, but there is none in Shakespeare's plays.

THE EFFORT TO EXALT LOVE in Shakespeare as the Great Redeemer runs afoul of what Shakespeare actually shows us. G. Wilson Knight has said of Antony in *Julius Caesar* that his "victory is the conquest of love, love which saw only in Caesar a true friend and a great man . . ."¹⁰ But, alas, this is the same Antony, of love all compact, who delivers what is probably the most bloodthirsty speech in the play, summoning up the dogs of war. It is Antony who calmly picks names for execution without any discernible qualms of conscience, who says nothing about love and compassion in the civil strife that follows. Is his love for Caesar more beneficent than Marullus' and Flavius' for Pompey? Portia and Calpurnia love their husbands. Is their love insignifi-

cant compared to Antony's? Love in Shakespeare is not a divine principle but a private possession. Its poetic fire converts no one. The love of Antony and Cleopatra does not convert Charmian and Iras, who will never be Cleopatras.

Yet with some critics and readers of Shakespeare the notion lingers that in a way noble feelings and ideals are powerful influences. Portia saves Antonio from the wicked Jew, but there is no evidence that her magnificent speech on mercy has had any effect at all on any of those present at the trial. Nor is it true to say that Portia understands what she has said. She strips Shylock to the bone, using the law to deprive him of even the faintest vestige of self-respect. The retreat to the romantic world of Belmont in the final act is an escape from the deeper passions dramatized in Shylock's lust for revenge. How much easier to dwell in sylvan retreats and pamper the senses than try to understand the tortuous complexities of human nature that rise to the surface in Shylock. An eloquent speech on mercy may move us, but it does not change anything in Shakespeare's plays.

WHEN CRITICS TALK of the ennobling effects of love, they must remember that, above all else, Shakespeare is a realist. Desdemona's love for Othello turns Brabantio into an embittered cynic. She may weep over Othello's barbed comments, but expresses little remorse for what she has done to her father. Gertrude may love her son, but she continues to sleep with Claudius. Antony loves Cleopatra, but love has not, apparently, turned him into a lover of mankind. Lear's love for Cordelia does not dissuade him from killing the hangman. He has not changed his ideas about the world or grown to love his fellow men. Antony loves Caesar, yet is consumed by bloodlust. Hamlet may love Ophelia, but he berates her mercilessly as though she were a common slut and cold-bloodedly lugs her father's guts out of the chamber.

Love, in other words, conforms to no ethical or spiritual absolute, is not always in Shakespeare a soft and gentle effluence shedding sweetness and light. It is made of sterner stuff, selects, as Emily Dickinson put it, its own society and then shuts the door. It does not exist to save the world or resolve feuds, but to fulfill itself though in doing so, it lose the world. It may, at times, bend, as Ophelia does, to parental commands, but it cannot undo itself, cease to be what it is; she does not stop loving Hamlet. Nor can it foresee the future, gauge the effects of its actions, shield itself from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. It is self-justifying, out of the reach of reason and wisdom, heedless of how others may love so long as it may pursue its own destiny. Each of the characters in Shakespeare who loves does so in his or her own fashion. It is this

extraordinary richness in the plays that beggars all attempts to reduce love to a single ethical or spiritual principle, to claim for it more than it is or can do or can feel. For Shakespeare love is what it is. We should be thankful for it, but not reduce it to a vaporous abstraction without energy and passion.

¹ *As They Liked It*, Harper Torchbook ed. (N.Y., 1961), p. 6.

² Franklin Dickey, *Not Wisely But Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1957), p. 106.

³ Dickey, pp. 108-9.

⁴ G.G. Gervinus, "Romeo and Juliet," *Shakespeare Commentaries*, tr. F.E. Bunnett, 5th ed. (London, 1892), p. 211.

⁵ *Shakespeare: His Mind and Art*, Capricorn paperback ed. (N.Y. 1962), p. 121.

⁶ Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Common Understanding* (N.Y. & London, 1967), p. 173.

⁷ *Shakespearian Comedy* (London, 1955), pp. 97-8.

⁸ Lord David Cecil, "Shakespearean Comedy," *The Fine Art of Reading and Other Literary Essays* (Indianapolis & N.Y., 1957), 39.

⁹ "Helena," in *Shakespeare: The Comedies*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1965), 138.

¹⁰ "The Eroticism of Julius Caesar," *The Imperial Theme* (London, 1963), p. 94.

The Offering

TIM WALTERS

It's morning
And a flower yawns,
Scraping its jaws on the breeze,
Stretching its leaves,
Waking from the tightly
Folded bud of night—
My desire.
A bird upon a wire
Waits,
Watching me break
The stale bread in my hand.

Hands

ROBERT KLEIN ENGLER

November green begins to grain
the grass. The edge of growth
spills slowly out like colors
on a blotting cloth. A day
or two and brown bush buds
will break. It is spring on
the pampas. With the architects
and matrons we motor from the city
to Catamarca. *Pura senorita de*
Buenos Aires. I sit, still in white
and wait. White dress with hand
sewn lace, white shoes, white hat
and gloves, the second change
my mother ordered worn today.
She and father talk of the hospital,
how the railroad pensioners will
gain by it. How fortunate we are.
The company can use Indians
as laborers. We need not hire
high paid workers from town.

There is nothing here but field.
The men go off to tape and measure.
I walk alone around the cars,
worried by Indians squatting,
robed like graven stone. They have
no shoes. They wear no gloves.
Their eyes are dim like the room
where father smokes alone at night.
I hide my hands beneath my shawl.
Slowly, I slide off my gloves.
I let them see my hands naked.
I recall this now as the artist
leaves. I look through the curtains
to the boulevard. It is spring.
My husband wishes to commission my
portrait. He ordered me to dress
in white. The artist says he can do
my head, but charges more for hands.

Kelman On The Machine

ROBERT WEXELBLATT

"I used to be a teacher, but then I gave up reading books."

"Why?"

"I felt guilty."

"Why guilty? Teachers always read books, don't they?"

"Well, it seemed unfair to my students. I was already so far ahead of them. The whole thing was dishonest anyway."

"It seems to me you may have carried your egalitarian sentiments too far. You don't suppose it was dishonest of you to present the ideas of other people to your students, do you?"

"Of course not. The dishonesty lay in my being seduced by the temptation to present other people's ideas as if they were my own."

"Why did you do that?"

"So as not to appear inferior."

"To your students?"

"To my students? No, to the people I impersonated by stealing their ideas."

KELMAN STOPPED TYPING and looked at the radio on the bookcase against the wall. It was not turned on. It was not even plugged in. Because he wanted to plug it in and put it on (he allowed himself a punitive glance at his watch and estimated that Siegfried would be winding up his Rhine journey) he didn't. Because he wanted also to go away, to eat a plum, to sleep on his bed, he didn't. Because he wanted, most of all perhaps, to stop typing,

he didn't.

"I am frequently astonished by the reality of my typewriters. Reality, did I say that? No, what I am shocked by is their potential, which is entirely deceptive, only a joke, and not a very elaborate one either. It is a joke very much at my expense, since this potential doesn't really exist in the machines at all, but in me or in my eventual heir whom I can easily imagine thinking the same wry thoughts as he contemplates this portion of his legacy in the future of fire or whirlbirds. Typewriters have no entelechy. For instance. One evening my daughter, who shall definitely not inherit my typewriters, asked me for a story. Without any concern about the story, about its qualities of development, suspense, characterization, links to tradition, or imagery, I was able to reel off one of my famous instrumental tales which at once achieved the intended effect. She fell asleep long before I had to figure out the reversal of the heroine's dim fortunes. Around here these stories, always made incomplete and aimless by boredom or sleep, pass for an oral tradition. But the next day. "Daddy?" "Yes, sweetheart?" "Remember the story you told me last night?" "Umm." "Would you write it down for me. Write on your typewriter. And draw some pictures. I want to take it to school."

Kelman is neither the best nor the worst person to tell this story. The best would of course let the story tell itself; the worst perhaps would be so utterly literate that, like Flaubert in his imaginary *Spirale*, he would compel the tale to try to nourish itself on style alone, so that it could never get to the end of its meal. Stories eat up words and words eat up paper and paper devours patience, not to mention trees and hearts. So Kelman, miserable, comfortable, repentant Kelman, Kelman solitary, nasty, brutish, and short is a middling narrator and you should know it.

"But what's this story *about*?"

This is what all people who adore rubber-necking at the scenes of accidents, fires, public suicides, this is what all such people wish to know. And quite right too. Only the overeducated fail to grasp what such a question means. What "happens"—that's what the question really means, or rather that is what it should mean in all its naivete'. Since everything happens, the question can only mean what portion of what happens is this story concerned with, and how it, the story, comes out. Among all happenings, which is the last? That is, when will Kelman choose to end it, if Kelman has a choice at all? Answer: unless you are prohibitively bored or have fallen asleep, not yet.

“ONCE UPON A TIME a defrocked priest went to see a childhood friend of his who had remained a monk. The monastery in which his order lived was two day’s distance; to get there meant an arduous journey over mountains, through bogs, across fens, along the edge of an impenetrable jungle, down side-streets, across a shopping plaza, right through two parking lots, and over a suspension bridge. On this bridge the defrocked priest, who carried his life’s savings in his pocket, paused because he was overcome with a great unnamable longing. In the piteousness engendered by this longing he threw his savings over the side of the suspension bridge and into the moiling flood. The sky was warm, the air was rich, the ground was obedient, the grass was thick. In the distance, across a meadow, he could discern the monastery of his friend, beautiful and old, with a spire that leaned tropistically toward the sun. His heart filled and he walked toward its venerable walls along a well-worn path shaded by ancient elms. He could already imagine the gothic courtyard, the deep silences of the library, the graceful face of his old friend. Just when he was coming to the great wooden doors he remembered a rumor that had reached him to the effect that his friend had recently been elected abbot. This made him pause once again. As a defrocked priest he felt unworthy to impose on their old friendship, of which the new abbot was bound to be ashamed. No, the whole visit was really indecorous, the fault of thoughtlessness and a lack of self-discipline, the old fault. Perhaps then he had much better simply return the way he’d come. He stepped back from the doorway to consider. Suddenly the doors sprang open and a mob of coarse-looking women carrying baskets of white laundry on their heads rushed clattering over the old stones of the portico in their wooden shoes. There must have been forty, fifty of them. Several pinched his cheek as they passed and obscenely whispered to their companions, who giggled grotesquely. Right behind the women came a band of men in faded blue jeans and long mustaches who meandered out over the meadow and river-bank. They were carrying frisbees, baseball bats, a rolleyball set, footballs, backgammon boards, croquet mallets, picnic hampers, bottles of wine. And as they went they sang a robust chorus to the tune of a drinking-song the priest remembered from a time that seemed cons past:

Belly of a bluescaled fish,
Tigrous eye, unblinking, wide,
An ink-stained mirror on a dish:
To show, or hold, what sages hide . . .

KELMAN STRETCHED OUT his left arm and shifted onto his left buttock, then to the right, raising his right arm toward the ceiling. The stretching upward made him think of the

floors above. What were they doing up there? As if in answer there was a quick rush of water through the pipes.

"I love my wife and yet we have never gotten along properly. We are on a see-saw, up and down with no equilibrium. When I'm up, she's down and vice-versa. Our weight is against us. A funicular arrangement."

"And you think that is unusual? that, again this time, there's anything at all special in your case?"

"Did I say so? What case? What's it matter? I simply yearn to get along better—maybe she does too?"

"What do you mean by 'get along'?"

"I mean everything by it, I suppose. Anything but this drift, as if we were a little more dead every day, as if death came in with the orange juice."

"It may, you know. But tell me about your wife."

"It won't be easy because it seems to me she is always changing. You'll have to tell me when you want her to be."

"Well last April, then."

"That was when she was a short-haired desperate woman who couldn't put down a book."

"Two years ago."

"A sweet and innocent young matron who doted on the flower boxes."

"Five years ago."

"Dirty with *la vie bohème* and the constant thought of illiterate lovers."

"Last week."

"An entrepreneur, or euse, a mistress of accounting and double-entry financial manipulation. She dressed in pants suits and spiked Italian boots. Her handbags became subtle weapons. She applied for a job as a bank president and was hired on the spot, but

after her trip to Geneva she resigned."

"Why?"

"Because . . . because, she said, men didn't have any idea of what to do with their money and that irritated her."

"And now?"

"And now she wants to write poetry and familiar essays."

DEEP IN KELMAN'S PAST were buried certain moments of lucidity. It always seemed curious to him, throughout his at once monotonous and checkered career, that he could not recall the content of these moments, only that he had had them. And because of that he wanted so much to have them again—like sex, like drugs, or instead. One day he happened to read about Einstein's having carried around a briefcase full of little pieces of paper with the trivia of his existence written on them so that he could keep his mind free to think mathematical thoughts. From that moment the finitude of his own mind obsessed Kelman, which is to say he suffered from it to the point of sleeplessness. With horror he realized that those dear moments of lucidity would not only return but that, simply by virtue of still being alive, he was in reality always moving further and further away from them. They would soon be nothing but myths. At the same time, he felt himself becoming less and less alive because of the impossibility of these moments, so that the longer he lived the less he lived. The natural paradox was naturally intolerable to him. This may help to explain his painful habit of picking at his cuticles until they bled.

"THE DEFROCKED PRIEST'S OLD FRIEND, now the abbot, emerged from the doors of the monastery carrying a shield and spear. As the notes of the players' song trailed off he took up the lyric at the very top of his lungs. He had a good voice, but with something savage in it.

Arcanae in roots of heather,
Chthonous rumbling under clods:
If gods didn't make the weather,
Surely weather made the gods.

The abbot took no notice of the former priest, his old friend, so intently was he waiting for the next sounds. They came, though faintly because of the distance, from the women who evidently were beating

out the rhythm with their laundry against the river rocks. They sounded like witches.

Rivers wrap the spiral stone,
Storms blow soft through hollow reeds:
Interpenetrating bone,
Blood and marrow, sags and seeds.

To this the abbot replied as follows, still oblivious—forever oblivious—to his friend standing and trembling a mere six feet away:

Go pluck seeds from brittle pods,
Songs from lungs fretted with feather:
If weather hasn't made the gods,
Surely gods have made the weather."

KELMAN HAS THE REPUTATION of a man who keeps his distance. He acquired this character because of his very genuine indifference; but since this indifference discloses itself through a filter of good nature no one feels justified in accusing him of anything more serious than detachment. All the same, this detachment can express itself in peculiar ways. Once, for example, after a rather bad night, he presented his wife with a questionnaire. It had the depressing and inappropriate form of a multiple choice test. When she indignantly refused to fill it in, he shrugged his shoulders and filled it in himself. Also, unbeknownst to his family or friends, he has rented a room in the heart of the city, the most squalid he could find. Here he does nothing but keep a journal. He goes once a week, on Thursday afternoons. For this purpose he purchased an ancient portable typewriter from a pawnshop in the neighborhood—a neighborhood dense with such establishments. Oddly enough the pawnbroker was unexpectedly murdered the very next day by the same man who had sold him Kelman's typewriter. The journal is imaginary for the most part. It is—or purports to be—a chronicle of his own sixtieth year, though Kelman is only thirty-eight. In it he tends to emphasize his own innocence.

"I met her, let's say, on a bus or a train. At any event, in some public conveyance which normally lacks any social dimension and where one is blind to the aesthetic, though he may easily and probably take refuge in fantasy.

"In the bus she would have been sitting with her little feet flat on the floor. I would have been standing, lurching, above her, holding onto a strap. We have been furtively noticing each other for

several blocks. A collision occurs, let's say, when the bus swerves. Embarrassment. There is, after all, something immodest in our relative positions.

"The miracle is that, because of this collision, she recognizes me. How? A former student perhaps, or, better, the sister of one. She had been invited to sit in on a lecture of mine by her enthusiastic sibling. It was years ago, of course, but she has never forgotten it—or me.

"We begin talking, laugh because we cannot make ourselves heard, discover we both have some free time, go for coffee. The coffee-house is dark and cool after the brightness and fetidness of the bus and street. It is June. Our affair begins that very afternoon. We can't help ourselves. She has an apartment of her own.

"In July we arrange to spend an entire week together in a rented cottage on Cape Cod or Nantucket. Make it Nantucket. We are in love. We hardly talk to each other. Wonder crowds out words. All the same, I adore her voice: listening to her is exactly like having a woman's hand massaging the back of your neck, just where all your senses congeal into a ganglion . . ."

KELMAN USUALLY DOESN'T GIVE IN to such impulses. He did so in this case probably in order to punish himself. The origin of the banal fantasy was, as he well knew, a poem his wife had written and, with her own dark and irremediable purpose, placed under his plate one morning at breakfast. It was all in rhyme:

*Lights on calm water corruscate.
You offer plums upon a plate
that shine as purple as the moon
within its caul. Here on our dune
the grasses bend before a breeze.
You rest your chin on your drawn knees.
Across the beach the ocean still
sounds like a sleeper on a hill,
some giant whose diurnal roars
bass nocturnes roll in fitful snores.
So evening blooms in quietude
while you and I, our double mood
made of twined strands, sit together
fingering sand, breathing weather.*

*Tonight, how can I make a start
on problems of the head or heart?
How can I, with you sitting there,
think when the breeze disturbs your hair?
disturbs your hair, placates my mind
and turns me vague and makes you kind.*

The title of these sweet verses was written scathingly, in letters half again as large as the rest: "Something That Never Happened." Even for Kelman every word after that was a stab.

Kelman complains too much. His attitude toward his complaining is deceptive in that he affects a sternness with himself, a lack of sentimentality which barely masks his absence of generosity. Spiritually he is a miser; more exactly: both a miser and a pauper, for in the realm of the spirit ("realm" because it is both old-fashioned and magnificent) all misers are paupers. Kelman hears the confessions of others with impatience and, though he is a bit indulgent of his own, his purely personal desire for punishment is galling. It is untrue. His guilt has never gotten above the level of tropism. He waters his lawn too little.

"I once had a friend who became quite rich in the rug trade in New York. He retired young, which was both an error and a good idea, and bought an estate on Long Island which he called The Ground of Being. He was married relatively late in life, which was also both an error and a good idea. He and his wife, as it seemed to me, carried on their existence through a series of highly ornate diplomatic relations. Maybe it was a reflection of this that they were childless. My friend wanted to adopt. But the only kids he could get, he told me with a note of racial resignation in his voice, were Asiatics. This was yet another error and good idea—adopting an Asiatic child. The child, boy or girl, entered the family at the age of eight and quickly became a third—yet a third—power in this Triple Entente.

"My friend's was easily the best conducted household I have ever seen. All the same there came the separation, then divorce. The wife betook herself and her extortionistic alimony to Palm Springs; the child went off somewhere or other—perhaps back to Asia—and my friend put The Ground of Being up for auction.

"In their guest room the wallpaper had the texture of shadows on stucco. There was an antique Caucasian rug on the floor in which you could lose yourself for an entire geometrical hour. Outside the window you could glimpse part of the circular drive, a stand of real birches, a putting green. There were statues on the rolled

lawn, mottled with authenticity. Everywhere the colors were warm and yet everything was so cool to the touch."

KELMAN, WHO IS NEITHER the best nor the worst person to have told this or any other story, rises magisterially from his deadened typewriter. He approaches the radio on the bookcase by the wall. The wire lies like a molted snakeskin down the side of the bookcase. He picks up the plug and contemplates it. A long moment ensues during which you would almost think nothing is happening. Then he drops the plug, worms his way back to his desk, rather angrily flicks the electric switch that instantly brings the uptodate machine to an expectant attention with a clicking of its steel nerves. Even though it is three forty-five in the afternoon and he has been at his desk for hours, Kelman types:

*How can I, with you sitting there,
think when the breeze disturbs your hair?
Tonight, how can I make a start
on problems of the head or heart?*

Carpe Diem

GERALD W. SMITH, Jr.

Without
Gesture we know
Nothing. Speak the wordless
Talk: clear skies are beautiful, but
Empty.

Buoy Light

JON HANSEN

Nothing we do is ever lost to light.

—William Heyen

I'm already too late.
Somewhere out there, perhaps in Virgo,
I sit on a jetty listening
to the Shelter Island night.

A buoy flashes green,
guiding a fishing boat through the bay.
Its jacklights hover above bass,
who see them as constellations
floating across the water,
and boil them into semen.

Across the beach I hear a woman's laugh.
It rises past the dark above a beach fire.
I know I want her
to walk with me where the full moon pulls
pairs of horseshoe crabs, who furrow
mud with their spikes. The knead their eggs
into sand at the high water.

But our light has escaped this world.
Now the fishing boat lies in dry-rot
among bending reeds. The horseshoe eggs
grew in the Shelter Island sand
until grackles, looking for stray seeds,
found them.

Maybe now, before Spica sets,
as her aura flees toward Virgo,
I can enter her, pure as light,
as the buoy blossoms between us.

“The Holy Ghost” Rides Again

JOSEPH MEREDITH

OH, IT WAS GLORIOUS to be back! Monsignor Downey revved the engine of the little tractor with the snow plow on the front and popped the clutch. The machine leaped from the garage out into the schoolyard where the sun was fast turning the snow to slush. Everywhere things were melting and slipping away. His diaphragm still fluttered with excitement. He could hardly breathe without giggling.

He drove straight toward the St. Joseph Shrine in the center of the schoolyard. The tractor grumbled and the snow chains beat out a rhythm and, just as he neared the low fence around the statue, he swung the wheel hard, a full revolution to the left, describing a great circle in the snow.

It was wonderful to be whole again. For the first time in years he sang in no one's voice but his own. The words shot forth raspy and exuberant: “When the swallows come BACK to Capistrano.” He reached the point where the circle had begun and cut the wheel hard to the right, completing a gigantic figure 8 in the center of the yard.

He was celebrating his own return. He didn't give a damn about the Bishop. To hell with the gutters. He would buy a new ladder. Maybe Grogan would even return. Poor chicken-hearted Charlie Grogan. Nothing mattered except that Kevin Downey had returned: young and fleet and volatile as ever.

—Oh, welcome back, my boy, my boy.

He spent the rest of the morning plowing great sweeping parabolas and ellipses, huge roccoco swirls, and a grand alpha and omega in the slush.

THAT MORNING IN THE SACRISTY after saying the eight, Downey had removed the vestments hurriedly and left them for the boy to put away. He was ill at ease. At the consecration as he raised the Host, he had seen Grogan moving in the shadows of the organ at the back of the church. Why did that little blister of false piety always seem to be in the shadows? Why was he

never clearly in the light where he could be dealt with? All this fuss over something as silly as a ladder was ridiculous.

A nerve in his thigh thumped like an alarm as he struggled to pull on his overshoes. Something, he didn't know what, was falling in him like mercury in a barometer. All the signs were bad. A thin covering of snow had fallen during the night. The schoolyard, the lawns, and the school buildings wore it like a lie, or a good impersonation. The Sisters were probably already telling the younger children, "How God must love us to make everything so beautiful." What could you do with women like that?

He entered the rectory by the schoolyard entrance, kicked the sodden snow from his feet, and started down the paneled corridor. He paused at the portrait of Michael McVeigh, his predecessor at St. Clement's.

—Morning, Mickey, how's the boy?

The frame enclosed the slight figure of a man standing, somehow straighter than he had ever seen him stand in life, beside the carved cathedral chair that still occupied more space in Downey's study than he could spare. The painted hand rested on the high back of the chair.

The Monsignor stood now regarding the portrait rather than the man. Never stood like that, he thought.

—Did a lousy job on you, Mickey. Try to paint when they can't even draw a line.

He shot a glance the length of the deserted hallway and assumed his most imperial stance: right leg supporting his weight, left thrust slightly in advance, shoulders squared, arms hanging heavily behind the plumb of his body. He said in his best Charles Laughton voice:

—That's my last pastor painted on the wall/Looking as if he were lobotomized . . .

—Oh, it's you, Monsignor.

Startled, Downey jumped a step sideways with a grace that belied his formidable bulk.

—I heard voices. I thought someone had come in.

—Sweet Jesus, Mrs. Keenan, I swear I'm going to hang a bell on you like a leper if you don't stop sneaking up on people.

In the deep brown light of the hall, the troughs and furrows of Julia Keenan's face made her look for all the world like a chiaroscuro sketch by some anonymous master. She was the only person in the parish, man or woman, to rival the pastor's girth. Perhaps he appreciated her out of a sense of kinship. She tried to move lightly, it seemed to him, as though it were a matter of professional pride. But her body always rebelled against what might have been the soul of a slim girl trapped inside.

—You had a call from the Bishop's appointment secretary

about the Confirmation next week and Grogan says he's painted the ladder but he'll be a monkey's uncle if you ever catch him up it again.

She lowered her eyes and regarded the wet footprints he'd left on the carpet. For a moment, he expected a reprimand or a playful swat at the back of the head, but it wasn't Mama, it was Mrs. Keenan.

—They his words?

—There was a mite more pepper to them than you'll ever hear from me, Yer Reverence.

—No doubt, no doubt. Where is he now?

—That I don't know; I haven't seen him since you left to say the eight.

—Well, I imagine he'll turn up in some devilment or other. Thank you, Mrs. Keenan.

Dismissed, the woman moved away softly down the hall. The flesh of her buttocks and hips quivered and punched at the inside of the print housedress like willful gelatine. Look at that, he thought, like a couple of kids fighting under a blanket. Then in the clipped, asthmatic tones of Sidney Greenstreet he pronounced, "Whenas in silks my Julia goes/Then, then, methinks, how badly goes/That revolution in her clothes." A smile of delight curved his lips. When Mrs. Keenan disappeared into one of the side parlors, he started with a weighty sigh up the back stairs to the third floor. Have to work on Orson Wells for the Bishop, he thought.

Lord, must there always be a fight? Why just now with the Bishop due? It seemed the more importance you laid on a job, the less likely it was to get done by Charles Grogan. Had to treat him like a kid. "If you get a chance, Charlie . . . No hurry, Charlie, whenever you get time . . ." Christ only knows why he always took him back. How many times had he fired him? Five? Six? There must be something about Grogan he liked or feared.

Grogan had a way of looking at you as though he was aiming a rifle. His left eye would almost close and he'd cock his head a little to the right, and shoot off something like, "With God's help I'll get to it today," or, "God willing, it won't rain before I cut the grass." Oh, it was an act. Of course, it was an act. But, Mother of God, why did he always have the feeling of having been slightly wounded? How could the little piss-ant leave the impression that he was an instrument? There was the feeling sometimes, never explicit, never concrete, that he was merely being played by someone else.

SITTING ON THE EDGE of the bed, Downey slipped on a pair paint-spattered sneakers. He picked up the dark gray letter sweater from its peg on the door as he passed into the study. He

stood examining dejectedly the places where the stitching was broken around the light gray SC of St. Charles. The elbows were baggy and worn as though there were arms always in the sleeves. Pressing it to his face, he inhaled the dark, musty odor of every locker room he had ever smelled. This worn sweater had more claim on his affection than any living thing. It belonged to a boy who had gotten lost a long time ago, and he loved it; a boy whose loping grace in pursuit of fly balls for the seminary team had earned him the nickname, "The Holy Ghost"; who moved as though loosed from the bonds of mortal effort. *O fight, fight, fight, for the Gray and Gray.*

It was never difficult to go back. It was always the same when he did. How many times had he legged it out? He was stooped a few feet off the bag at first, up on the balls of his feet, arms relaxed, fingers extended. The big cracker from Mahanoy City on the mound look over to first and then to the plate. At the instant the pitcher's body started to lean toward second, he was off. The cross-over and one-two-three digging strides, and he heard the crack of the ball off Timmy McKeever's bat and saw the white blur streaking for the gap in left-center. He touched the inside corner of second in full stride. It was all so easy, just like Cobb. Always the same. He saw the third baseman, hands on hips, looking to center and Father Flood smiling and waving him easily around. There shouldn't even have been a play. Then whatever happened happened again as his cleats bit into the grass on the dugout side of the line, and dirt and grass and sky blurred into a monstrous avalanche, and there was the catcher reaching down with that eternal smirk touching him delicately on top of the head with the ball. Then he was up and scrambling, and the thud was always the same when his fist crashed into the back of the catcher's head. And then the moiling of arms and legs. And faces as red and hot as the blood behind his eyes. And the slipping feeling in his guts. And he was never safe.

Kneeling by the cot in his cubicle that evening, he had prayed for guidance. God forgive him, a man was not a beast. A man was a brother, bound in blood and spirit to all men. But as he prayed there was still the echo, somewhere behind his eyes, of the red throbbing he had felt that afternoon. It was quieter now, less insistent, but it was there, rhythmic and compelling as the memory of a chant or a cheer from the stands. He saw again the white ball descending and the catcher's dirt-streaked face smiling that twisted smile. And he knew his prayer was no good.

The Prefect of Discipline had suspended him from further competition and admonished him to suppress this thing, "this mark of Cain that we all carry with us." And Mama had encircled him in her great arms and pressed him to her bosom and rocked

him as though he were a child again. "You're a Lenahan through and through," she had sobbed, "it's me has done this to you." And he had suppressed it, Jesus, he had. Suppressed it so well that he didn't exist anymore. And over the years Kevin Downey disappeared into a sack of flesh and a bag of tricks so that even he didn't know where he was or how to summon him. Where was the fleet boy who could run all day, the boy who laughed with life and not at it?

FROM THE WINDOW, Downey spotted the stoop-shouldered form of Grogan moving across the front lawn. He was carrying a length of pipe under one arm, walking unstably in the snow, toward the utility shed behind the garage. *Lord, give me patience*, he breathed, and left the room.

Downey pushed open the shed door and light fell in on a wedge of greasy floor. The place smelled of gasoline and rotting grass. It was cold and damp. The bulb over the workbench in the rear was lit and small clouds of Grogan's breath rose toward it and disappeared like little prayers. Grogan, still with the pipe under his arm, rummaged in a tool box with his free hand. He turned, Downey thought, with the slow precision of a tank turret, the pipe drawing a bead, and for a moment Downey fancied himself Robert Jordan after the blowing of the bridge. *Come on, you big gray fascist bastard. Arre, caballo!*

— . . be a horse of a different color.

Robert Jordan vanished at the sound of Grogan's voice.

—What's that?

—I say it'd be another matter altogether if his nibs was the one being asked to lug his butt thirty feet up a painted ladder. Praise God, the thing's been here as long as I have.

—And a good coat of paint'll add years to it yet.

—And hide the cracks 'til it falls away from under you.

—Grogan, you're a superstitious old woman. That ladder's sound as the Chair of Peter.

—Aye, it's not Peter's Chair you're wanting me to stand on to clean them gutters.

Downey ran his hand over his forehead, down over his squinting eyes, and gripped his chin, doing his Edgar Kennedy slow-burn.

—I don't have to remind you who it is pays your salary, do I, Grogan?

—And I don't have to remind the Pastor he pays me to be a handy man and not a stunt man.

—This is insubordination.

—It's common sense and nothing else.

He kept his Barry Fitzgerald for last resorts. It was for just such occasions that he had considered taking up smoking a pipe.

—Now, Charlie, try lookin' at it from my point of view. I've got the Bishop comin' to confirm the little ones, and here's me gutters all clogged up with leaves and wee bird's nests. Now, I ask ya, what's a fella to do?

Grogan turned back to the tool box with an audible sound of disgust.

—C'mon, now, Charlie.

—Beg pardon, Monsignor, but don't *Charlie* me. I've seen your act before, y'know, and I won't be climbing any painted ladders.

—What kind of heathen are you Grogan, to turn your back on Holy Mother Church in her hour of need?

—Holy Mother Church? Next I suppose you'll be telling me the Pope himself's depending on me.

—Grogan, the Pope's depending on you.

The man spat on the floor and moved into the shadows behind a barricade of old paint cans and dried-out brushes. Downey felt the sinking, slipping feeling in his guts again. He was losing control of his diaphragm and fairly whinnying with rage.

—I'll go up myself.

Grogan's voice came out of the shadows with a sound like glee.

—You're liable to come down before you're intending.

Downey let out a long, echoing roar worthy of Victor McLaglen. He swung his beefy forearm into the wall of cans that separated him from the mocking Grogan. There was a din like that of a packed stadium as the cans clattered and bounced and clattered again. He made no move toward Grogan, who was backing toward the wall, his arms reaching out behind him for support. The custodian was fully in the light now, his eyes and mouth wide open.

—Glory be to Jesus, I think you're daft.

DOWNEY LET OUT another roar, a great chestful of vowels and glottals. He relished the feeling: like flopping into a good chair after a day on his feet. He picked up a brush, fat and crusted with green paint, and slammed it to the concrete. It rebounded and made a flat arc in the air like a swinging third strike. This was wonderful. This was better than confession. He wasn't angry anymore. He was excited. All around his body he could feel great slabs of blubber melting away. "*The Holy Ghost*" rides again. He looked excitedly for something else, anything. This mustn't end. He grabbed an old broom from the corner. The head was worn into a curve like a sickle, and he began swinging it in arcs above his head all the while bellowing as loud as he could. He still had made no move toward Grogan, but the little man was squealing like a stuck pig and looking for cover. The light went out with an ex-

plosion of sparks and flakes of bulb fell on the both of them like glass snow. He splintered the broom handle across his thigh. Grogan darted for the door screaming, "You're daft, you're daft." Downey was after him bellowing. "You're right, you're right."

Down the alley between the rectory and the garage they ran like an archangel vanquishing a cowardly devil; Grogan crying back over his shoulder, "I quit, I quit," with Downey puffing and slipping and losing ground in the chase laughing, "You're fired, you're fired."

When they got out to the Boulevard side of the Church, three nuns were marching the third-graders down the slippery path toward the front doors. Grogan broke through the ranks of the children and dashed across the Boulevard. Downey pulled up and watched him go. The expression on the faces of the children changed in unison from pious to bewildered. They were wonderful. Everything was wonderful. Everything was slim and young and laughable. Puffing great spirits into the air, Downey summoned one last magnificent roar. The children cheered. The nuns, turning discreetly to their charges, clicked their clickers for order.

Downey smiled.

—Good morning, Sisters. Good morning, children.

Muffled and bundled, the children sang back like a cheerful choir of arctic pygmies, "Good mor-ning-Mon-seen-yor."

He turned and jogged lightly back to the garage.

Oh Mama, it's me, darling, he thought, it's me, Kevin, your son.

Poem For the Season

A Tender Wet Narcissus

L. S. ARMBRUSTER

A tender wet narcissus
From the winter's scourge
Is left—
A new love always circles
From an old
Love's death.

In Sickness and in Health

KAY DEETER

They may never kill.
Marlo and Richard
are at home
with listening
while others are
at work at working.
Their door is locked
and locked.

The woman upstairs
wants Marlo's man.
The man upstairs
wants Richard's woman.

They load their fretful
mouths with graphic words.
Shhhhh. Someone suggestively
coughs in the next block.
The late paperboy ends
his route and starts
their watchful night.
These are the hours.
She shelves the
naughty novel,
double-checks the
double locks, and
goes to her husband
like wax. Her negligee drags.

A gun points toward the ceiling.
It is capable of pointing
toward the door.

The paperboy may collect
too much some night.
He must be fourteen
and know.

Contributors

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